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departure

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Editors :

JOHN ADLARD . ALAN BROWNJOHN

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NINEPENCE

DEPARTURE

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EDITORIAL

"UNDERGRADUATE experience is necessarily fragmentary and the poem is its best means of literary expression," wrote a correspondent who approved of the considerable space devoted to poetry in the first number of "Departure". This may, or may not, be true, but even if it is it does not suffice to explain the dearth of even moderately good creative prose by university writers. Undergraduate time is, however, fragmentary also. This takes us a little further towards the answer, but not far enough; and we are finally left wondering if both the desire and the ability to write short stories, for example, does indeed exist at all for more than a select few.

Part of the explanation might, of course, be sought in the stylistic dilemma of the contemporary writer of English prose. The tradition of modern English writing prompts him to grace and care in style, even in recording experience of the most subjective character; yet he must face also the weighty challenge of a Mr. Green, whose vitality and power lies partly in a purposeful and a brilliant disobedience of the rules of syntax. But before this train of thought induces us to read the motives and difficulties of the accomplished writer into the most ordinary short story of undergraduate emotions and situations, it would be well to call a halt and express a certain relief: for the poets, after all, are still with us in force.

In addition to work by Oxford poets—with the emphasis this time on some newer poets—we are pleased to be able to include poems by two poets who have only recently left the university, and by three established poets of distinction. Our plan is always to reserve at least one-third of our space for poems. But all contributions are welcome, and we await in especially hopeful anticipation the arrival of some good prose.

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VERNON WATKINS

The Mare

The mare lies down in the grass where the nest of the skylark is hidden.
Her eyes drink the delicate horizon moving behind the song.
Deep sink the skies, a well of voices. Her sleep is the vessel of Summer.
That climbing music requires the hidden music at rest.

Her body is utterly given to the light, surrendered in perfect abandon
To the heaven above her shadow, still as her first-born day.
Softly the wind runs over her. Circling the meadow, her hooves
Rest in a race of daisies, halted where butterflies stand.

Do not pass her too close. It is easy to break the circle
And lose that indolent fullness rounded under the ray
Falling on light-eared grasses your footstep must not yet wake.
It is easy to darken the sun of her unborn foal at play.

KATHLEEN RAINE

The Company

So many gathered in my room last night.
I felt them close all round me, existences,
Living presences, invisible essences
Each centered in its own peculiar secret joy,
Each joy given being by a peculiar wisdom
Pertaining to its nature like a dimension,
Or like a world, enclosed within a spirit,
But none a spirit enclosed within a world.

Not in the world, and yet they gathered in my room;
Some stood still inside the door, some
Thronged the firelight and the shadow, some hung
Like resting birds, in the curtains, perched high
On bookshelves, poised on the opening flowers
Of a hyacinth, others hid in their own fiery darkness.

Where had they come from?
Out of my joy, out of my sorrow,
Living entities sprung into life from the dust
Of my existence, taking wing, making song?
Or were they there already, before I came
Alone into my room, waiting
Until my joy should open eyes to see them,
Until my sorrow should reach down
Into the depths of being, and there find them,
Find such company of living multitudes.

JAMES KIRKUP

Poem written in invisible ink

I, whom you cannot actually see,
But whom, if you seek, you will perceive
Like bright stars in the sky at sunny noon,
Or even, if you are fortunate, glimpse
High in the blue heavens of a frosty day
Like the crescent moon's wan flake of melting wax
Dropped on the hotplate of a year of light.

I, the product of the wilful schoolboy's
Practical jokeshop and the skilful papermaker's art,
Am the blank mirror where my image
Died before it was realized, yet still
Invisibly is manifested, as if a phantom,
Looking with immortal eyes upon its shade,
Could only see that nothing which the mortal eye invents.

The poet, too, has had something to do with me,
But what it is I cannot tell you, unless
You are a poet, or possess a poet's memory.
At least you will not impress upon him now
Either 'an apparent brilliance' or 'an intellectual obscurity.'
His word, you see, is as good as yours, dear critics, (you
'Lice in the locks of literature'), or even better.

From a bottle of ink that looks like water
I emerged, but was not writ in it. I left behind
So many other poems that will not materialize,
Or if they do, they don't. But it is the speaking words
That matter, not their appearances upon the stage
Of print; the silences within the mind's unpublished night,
Not their approximates in black and white.

All I have to say is perfectly plain.
Grammar and punctuation you may ignore
As I did, who know nothing of them.
My language, concise to the point of disappearance,
Belies its 'curious contents' and 'their still stranger forms,'
Is neither flowery nor factual, nor even
'A disappointing mixture of both.'

I can be read at a glance, this is my 'patent promise.'
First-hand experience can enjoy me like a picture filled
At second-hand with all the blanks that your imagination draws.
My music, like a contemporary child, is heard, not seen; enfant
Terrible who will not do what he is told, the death of art.
(I am, of course, hoping you will read between my lines:
That is why I have left them all so far apart.)

But whether in printed character or not,
It is not here that you will find me.
Approach me to creation's fire, and you may see
What you have least expected, a miracle revealed
As something more than words can tell. And if the printer
Appears to have come between us now, it's really nothing,
Dear reader, (whom the muses bless), nothing at all.

PETER DALE SCOTT

Touching

I will not speak not break
The appetite
Which sets you wandering in the night.

I will not ease not graze
Not exorcize
That which illuminates your eyes.

But deplore the general undevilled air,
The absence of saint's fire, from which we are
Sick with the cure.

Your pain is simple, it would not be much
Arrogance or deity to touch.
Only this word puts devils out of us;
But who will be holy when the rest are such?

I will not speak, with most of us
Successful as oceans, aching to have lost
Your precious residual wanderlust:
Your pain at being thus, or thus.

TERENCE HEYWOOD

Source of Light
(at Edison's funeral)

To this dark grave so solemnly we bring
The genius who made light of everything
(Where else the sauce?) Those who put out God's light
Cannot escape the everlasting night.

MARTIN SEYMOUR-SMITH

New Year

Then turn your head. It is easy
For the music is behind the wall;
And behind your eyes a vision
Of kisses as the slow notes fall.

As time is cruel, marks joy as dreams,
Consumes their promise as singing
Swells, falls and fades in air, so now
You think of that awakening

In arms foreign, yet so much your own.
I call it futureless, yet how you weep:
Your warm heart so full of hope to dare
Histories of similar sleep.

PEARCE YOUNG

Sonnet to an Unknown Lady

Somewhere in verse I read too much of you,
Of laurel bowers, green, archaic, old.
And loving much, in reading there I knew
That Laura's hands, once realised, were cold;
That Stella's tears and Delia's dusty sheep
Were pampered art which strained against the crutch
Of old desire. Mad fancy made them sleep
And Julia's hair was slippery to the touch.

And though I built my songs of cruder rhyme,
Of cold gone deep or rivers thick with rust,
Of empty bowers where the birds of time
Fly blind within a whorl of yellow leaves,
Within the mind the old world still believes
And carves the golden branches with its trust.

CHRISTOPHER DRIVER

Imagined Water

My heart is bruised with the onset of the swan
The wings that flail the silent wanderer
By the shore of words. Gone is the feathery wake of him,
Left only the stunned impatience of recovery.

Sprawled broken in the reeds my eyes were open
To the healing sky and the unhoped-for consummation,
The union, as of clouds in the foam and crash of thunder.

Not for long does the sun burn. Already the tide
Is ebbing: the bird complacently gliding back
Over the lake: the pride and agony preparing to depart.

J. E. M. LUCIE-SMITH

The Temptation of St. Anthony

He in the mirror of the air looks back
And frightening in the dusk of summer sees
The human-headed kestrel on his track.

Easy the dusk of summer: not at ease
The circular landscape or the moderate stream
Where an enormous fish leaps through the doubled trees.

But being a simple man, he calls it dream
And as he hurries to the rectory gate
Will not allow that things are as they seem.

Within, a fire is burning on the grate,
His daughter knits.
His sermon still to write
He draws the curtains, says he will be late.

Then as the church-clock measures out the night
Prays Gods for blindness of his second-sight.

J. O. REED

October 1951

October and a litter of dead leaves
That start and scamper in a child's direction
After the passing cars, despair each time.
A devil prowls along the hedge and turns
The berries sour with spit; and every windfall
Wears his corruption proudly for a fruit.

Now all the holidays have stripped their fruit
The bright express, running to schedule, leaves
As clocks articulate and signals fall
With hopes to give old lines a new direction.
We do not face the future. Each one turns
Back to the sifting trees that tell his time.

Involved in a seamless garment of time
But for the rending year and rapture of fruit
My tattered fool again takes all his turns
For the worse, and repetitious leaves
Draw me once more in their perverse direction,
And strip off my Octobers as they fall.

No, I am not complaining my yellow downfall
Nor making account of this engrossing time
For I traffic with time in another direction
From the rosebud that must turn to hairy fruit
For I have turned my time to what it leaves
And watch the new despair to which it turns.

Therefore how can I fall to the year's promised turns
Or gather any month that may befall?
Or wear an apron of fallacious leaves
To trick the anatomic twigs of time?
My devil with his spittle sours the fruit
Which is forbidden me at his direction.

What if I took October's redirection,
Toppling with the year that overturns
And caught the year's own carelessness of fruit?
What if I stood and watched the slow leaves fall
Later and later—Until I knew in time,
There could be no year's parting with my leaves?

But can I ask leaves to shed my own direction,
Or pay up my time in the hope of returns?
This is not my fall, I still bear private fruit.

IMAGERY IN THE FILM

by Annemarie Heywood

IF we assume that an artist in creating does not merely wish to 'set down' (as Eliot phrases it) impressions and thoughts as in a diary, that is, if we assume that art is not merely the private purgation of a troubled mind, but that the artist may wish to go beyond the defiant "Art for myself" of D. H. Lawrence, we will find that he has to consider the problem of objectifying his intimate manifesto sufficiently to make it communicable. This admittedly is difficult, especially today, since former frames of reference, the traditional hierarchies of belief and moral standards, have largely lost their universal validity. We still, each for himself, seek, with greater or lesser satisfaction and success, a personal order; but often find ourselves asking whether our interpretation of the world of experience is not comparable to that of a madman, isolated from any norm and foreign even to our closest friend. It is difficult to state our individual departure, and validate our personal arguments in terms of the metaphysical chaos in which we find ourselves. Discipline becomes imperative, clarity in stating our premisses and defining our terms in even the most evanescent lyric, the most inconsequential design if it is to have integrity and validity. "Everybody knows all the questions, but nobody knows any answers", or rather, everybody has to find his own set of answers if he is to integrate his experiences and control his actions. A work of art always presents such an answer, the formulation of an intellectual or emotional complex, finite and complete; but if it is to be evaluated by others, if they are to share in the artist's insight, if this insight is to enable them to enjoy or to endure life with a new awareness and strength (which Johnson claims art does, or should do), it must be stated in universal language. Otherwise a work of art will not be a significant condensation of experience, but may at best be a stimulant, an unexpected and unsolicited manifestation of beauty. Like a sunset, a butterfly, or like a lovely woman it may move us deeply; what we get out of it, however, what we read into it, what complexes, in other words, it may release or crystallise, depends on us, the observers, our momentary disposition and the associations it may invoke for every one of us. Nothing is communicated, since our response is beyond the artist's control and may be quite alien to his original experience. This is no failure in itself, but we may feel it to be a shortcoming in artistic purpose.

Where, then, are we to look for a common denominator in a formula which will adequately express and communicate our ideas? We have to go to the roots, to reality which still has, in spite of our more sophisticated questionings, a known and definite value common to most of us. In a well-known passage Eliot states that "the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked". In the best and most

rewarding of his own poetry we do find that a complex emotional and intellectual reaction to the contemporary situation has actually "been communicated . . . . by a skilful accumulation of imagined sensory impressions". Pound, who uses imagery in a similar way, defines an image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time". This, then, is a starting point.

If this is to be applied to films, we have to ask ourselves whether a succession of explicit and immediate pictures (no longer *'imagined* sensory impressions') can properly be regarded as imagery. I think that it may or may not, depending on the way in which the medium is approached and the purpose it is made to serve. Very often, especially in commercial films catering for that imaginary convenience the 'Box Office' which is quoted to excuse facile mass productions of no artistic merit, it serves only to illustrate marginally, if gorgeously, some dramatic action; less often it is used to re-interpret such a story in a way proper to the medium. In this respect *Detective Story* is greatly superior to *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Both are filmed plays, the former little more. *Detective Story*, though adhering even more strictly to the Aristotelian discipline of space, time and action, is a fine film as well as an efficient interpretation of a play, in so far as it makes significant use of the potentialities of the medium, its rhythm and poetry. In the widest sense of course the plot itself becomes the 'objective correlative' of the state of mind which compelled its creator to communication, a symbolisation which is evident, for instance in Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* where the entire plot articulates an emotional conflict between two forces. Imagery in the true sense can be found in many of the best Russian and French productions. I am not thinking of the rare beauty of Jean Cocteau's 'poetic' art: his symbolisation has to my mind the inverse effect of mystifying where imagery should clarify by a sort of short-circuiting of the understanding; but of the realisation of a mood and a purpose in films like *Quai des Brumes* or *Earth*. Eliot's *Preludes* could be used straight off as shooting script for a 'mood-establishing' introductory sequence to any one of a number of pre-war French films. Humphrey Jennings' morale lyric *Listen to Britain* compels the imagination by this use of imagery strung together in a seemingly random series of free associations.

Symbolic imagery, that is, imagery that is not merely evocative of a mood but is made to represent an ideological complex, has been used with great effect, for instance in *La Bête Humaine*, where the rushing movement of trains comes to stand for the inexorable course of a predetermined fate which is at the same time uncontrollable and mechanically conditioned. The movement of the plot is forecast and underlined by this symbolism: the train thundering past when the hero's congenital madness first shows itself in his attack on the girl; the passive potency engines standing still at night in the railway yard when he fails to commit a premeditated crime. Orson Welles in *Lady from Shanghai* reinforces his climax by similar imagery: the hero, brought face to face with the treachery of the woman he loves, finds himself deposited in a deserted pleasure park and is giddily propelled through a chamber of

horrors; he is left in the hall of mirrors where the climactic gun battle takes place. Mirror after mirror, illusion after illusion is shattered, the multiple visions fall to pieces and finally among the bare walls the sorceress, robbed of her prismatic witchcraft, lies dying on the floor: he has reached detachment and wanders off without a single look back.

As an artistic medium, I like to think of the film as being closely related to poetry, although superficially the truest analogy would appear to lie in pictorial art. Unlike painting, however, the film moves dynamically in time as well as space. I believe that we enjoy an artistic creation because it presents us with a challenge, because we are called upon to make an effort, sympathetic or intellectual, and because we take pleasure in this determined self-sufficient expense of energy and the cathartic calm to which it leads in the finite perception of the particular achievement in its entirety, as a harmonious whole. This energy is, I think, in poetry mainly kinesthetic: its enjoyment lies in the sheer muscular appreciation of gradations between stress and ease: speed, compression and stasis. It is in the control of these dynamic powers that the film has its greatest potentialities, and there are many ways of achieving it. The rhythm of the moving pictures themselves can be made significant, as for instance in *Muscle Beach* which owes its superb lyrical quality almost entirely to the echoes and contrasts in such movement: the massive momentum of an athlete on the horizontal bar; the lightweight swoop of a gull; the knotted strain of exercising bodies; the infinite homeostasis of the sea—all unified by the subtle irony of the sung commentary. The ultimate impact of such a sequence again depends on the purposeful juxtaposition of the various dynamic impressions, whether movements are made to harmonise, to clash, or to annul each other, leaving the observer with feelings of tranquillity, conflict or confusion. If the object is static, the camera can still move and impose a rhythm of its own. Again, internal tension can be controlled by the speed of cutting. In Kaufman's city montage for *A Time for Bach*, for example, we are presented with two sequences of distinctive content: first, the aimless haste and confusion of a modern city in a breathtaking succession of disconnected impressionistic shots, cut so short individually as to leave hardly time for recognition; and second, a patterned formulation of the same ingredients made purposeful and harmonious in contrapuntal juxtapositions, symbolising the reconciliation of the Baroque art of Bach and the contemporary background.

The concentration or dissipation of our empathetic energies can be regulated by significant variation in focal distance from the urgent immediacy of the close-up (as for instance in the courtroom sequences of Dreyer's *Passion de Jeanne D'Arc*), over the noncommital middleshot to the detachment of a long perspective. *Detective Story* is another of the many films which end on a long high-angle shot, marking the collected calm, "all passion spent", following the dramatic climax. In the visually brilliant *Viva Zapata* extremes of camera-range are vividly alternated in the plantation riot sequence, so that we are allowed neither to gorge ourselves with empathetic adrenaline, nor to sit back in leisurely contemplation of an anthill disturbed, exclusively, but find ourselves

overwhlemed with the impact of two extreme points of view presented simultaneously.

By all these means the reality of the film can be made truer, more real even than the external world of objective fact, in so fas as it does not record reality as it is, but as it is significantly perceived by a human mind. Mental processes which determine our everyday perception are intimately emulated by the camera. An angle may establish an attitude: the low-angle shot of a dictator (or schoolteacher) blocking out the sky; the high-angle shot of the frightened, isolated boy in *The Fallen Idol*. ineffectual and helpless. Attention is focussed on a detail, a clock, a letter, a face, filling the entire frame. Superimposition and fading may adequately symbolise composite moods or speculation, the merging in the mind of images and thoughts. Time may become purely subjective; moments of acute awareness may occupy more footage than hours of subdued functioning, though possibly more pronounced 'action' in the general sense. As in a dream, which, objectively measured, may last only a split second, we may live through hours of horror, delight and adventure, so a second in conscious living may become inflated into vast significance by the intensity of realisation, emotional or speculative, which it releases. I remember specifically the sequence in *Bataille du Rail* where the railway worker is waiting to be executed. The acute tension of his last moments is sustained almost interminably as he watches a spider on the sunlit wall: the contrast between the realisation of the potential horror of the situation and the supersensory clarity of minutely observed irrelevant detail creates a potential of tense expectation which is released in tremendous relief only when he falls. Similarly, the suicide in the Russian *Deserter* is shown jumping from the bridge in almost static slow motion and hitting the water below with supernatural grace.

For the dramatic exploitation of these processes the film offers, I think, an idiom far more sensitive than the stage, since it allows at the same time for greater realism and a more intimate formulation. How the artifice of acted poetic arguments may actually become subservient to filmic dynamics, and conditioned by its context, was shown by Pudovkin in a well-known experiment; between shots of various situations of high emotional voltage he inserted the identical close-up of an impassive face, and found the audience acclaiming the actor's superb interpretation of appropriate reactions of horror, disgust, tenderness, and so forth.

This, then, is our inheritance: a challenging medium, sensitive and plastic, which offers an objectivity and validity rarely found elsewhere, leaving at the same time almost unlimited scope for the subjective patterning of an individual awareness. The ease with which results can be produced simply by pressing a button, is deceptive; the art of film-making imposes an exacting discipline, and the significant and purposeful exploitation of its potentialities demands conscious control of all the elements that make a moving picture. Only by this painstaking discipline can we achieve that artistic 'inevitability' which, in the words of Eliot, "lies in the complete adequacy of the external to the emotion."

THE BEAST BESIDE THE BED

Four Novels by Robert Penn Warren

by Walton Litz

ROBERT PENN WARREN began his career as one of Nashville's "fugitive" poets, studying under John Crowe Ransom at Vanderbilt University. A Rhodes scholar at New College, he received his B.Litt. in 1930. He has edited two literary magazines, taught at five universities, written a biography of John Brown, published two volumes of verse, one of short stories and four novels: *Night Rider* (1939), *At Heaven's Gate* (1943), *All the King's Men* (1945) and *World Enough and Time* (1950). He collaborated with Cleanth Brooks in the production of *Understanding Poetry*, a text of New Critical terms and fashions which is probably the most influential text book ever introduced into American education. He has written a brilliant critique of the *Ancient Mariner*, as well as a number of critical essays for the little reviews. The fact that he has been able to write four novels in the midst of this varied career is a testimony to his energy and discipline. That one of these (*All the King's Men*) is the finest American novel of the past decade is a testimony to the importance of his characteristic vision.

I'll Take My Stand, a collection of essays on Southern problems edited by Ransom, appeared in 1930 as a manifesto of the "Fugitive-Agrarians," a group of Southern writers which included Warren, Brooks, John Gould Fletcher and Allen Tate. It is propaganda for tradition and the virtues of an agrarian society, and represents an attempt to maintain the values of the Old South, the stability of its rural life, under the conditions of modern industrialism. This book is an important document in the study of Warren's fiction, for the conflict which it discusses is one that he repeatedly dramatises: the split between the survivors of the traditional order and the representatives of encroaching mechanisation and disorder. It is in relation to this theme that Warren's affinity with another Southern writer, William Faulkner, is most evident. *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Hamlet* present the same conflict in different generations, the Sartoris aristocracy of the Old South and the humble hill people pitted against the symbols of modern abstractionism. Like Faulkner, Warren's emblem for the failure of tradition is isolation, the destruction of love and the breakdown of language. "We're all isolated" says Horace Benbow, the spiritually impotent aristocrat in Faulkner's *Sanctuary*. Benbow and his antithesis Popeye, the physically impotent product of industrial society, are doomed to opposition by "the terrible division of their age," just as Adam Stanton, "the man of idea," and Willie Stark, "the man of fact," are destined to destroy each other in *All the King's Men*. When seen against the backdrop of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha stories, Warren's novels take their place in an historical pattern and assume the richness of perspective.

Warren's first three novels rehearse the same theme: the destruction or corruption of agrarian ideals by a society which can no longer assimilate them. Perse Munn, in *Night Rider*, gives his support to an association of small tobacco farmers who are fighting the dictatorial power of the eastern buyers. When the association is forced to go underground Munn remains loyal. He commits one murder in the name of the farmers and escapes, only to be convicted of another which he did not commit. In the end he is pursued and killed as a fugitive.

Jerry Calhoun and Private Porsum, Bogan Murdoch's lieutenants in *At Heaven's Gate*, find that they are betraying their own people in supporting Murdoch's plans for industrial expansion. They are faced with a choice between Murdoch on one side and their agrarian heritage on the other, and the distinctions which underlie this choice are blurred by the difficulty of interpreting the contemporary South in agrarian terms.

Neither Perse Munn nor Jerry Calhoun survive this conflict: the one is hunted down and killed, the other retires to his father's farm with no hope for the future. The situation of Jack Burden in *All the King's Men* is basically the same, but his story ends with an affirmation of free will and moral responsibility absent from the earlier works. Willie Stark, the dynamic demagogue who rises to the governorship and nation-wide power on the votes of the "redneck" farmers, draws three members of the old aristocratic order into his career—Adam Stanton, his sister Anne, and Jack Burden. Adam Stanton supports Willie reluctantly, suspicious of his motives but lured on by his promises of aid for the poor of the state; Anne becomes Willie Stark's mistress, hypnotized by the potentialities of his power; Jack Burden, the narrator of the novel, is Willie's henchman. Jack stays with the Stark regime long after he understands its essential corruptness, not because he condones Willie but because he has lost all will through a fatalistic belief in the Great Twitch. But Willie is killed by the disillusioned Adam, and he tells Jack Burden with his last breath: "It might have been all different, Jack, You got to believe that." And Jack finally comes to believe. He realises at the novel's close that his notion of the Great Twitch was merely an escape from history, from his responsibility to reshape the old agrarian values into a moral code capable of withstanding and modifying the conditions of life today.

World Enough and Time, Robert Penn Warren's latest novel, repeats the familiar design in an early nineteenth century setting. Jeremiah Beaumont, the central figure, feels that he must aid the bankrupt farmers in their struggle with the wealthy landowners, even though his own wife is the heiress to a plantation and his greatest friend is an aristocrat. However, Beaumont, soon becomes the tool of the embattled farmers, and unknowingly kills Cassius Fort, who has always treated him as a son (the father-son conflict is a major motif in Warren's novels: in *All the King's Men* Jack Burden unwittingly causes the death of his natural father, and in the other three the heroes are at war with their spiritual fathers). Beaumont is put in jail, but he soon escapes and is killed for the bounty on his head.

In this latest work Warren has deepened our view of his recurrent themes by placing them in the context of a former age. *World Enough and Time* is based on the real-life confession and trial records of Jeroboam Beauchamp, whose story also fascinated such diverse American writers as Edgar Allan Poe and William Gilmore Simms. In his use of this chronicle of the Kentucky frontier, Warren is probing among the historical roots of his previous novels.

Hemingway and Faulkner are Warren's masters in style, and he has indirectly acknowledged his debts to them with two of his finest critical studies .From Hemingway he learned the reportorial trick of reproducing conversation and action exactly as we think they happened; Hemingway himself, in one of his infrequent critical asides has called this technique a quest for "the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion." In Hemingway he also discovered how language can become a means of attaining aesthetic distance, a discipline proof against dishonesty and sentimentality. The concreteness of Hemingway's style, its sparing use of adjectives and freedom from abstractions, is an external check on the introduction of emotions not inherent in the original "sequence of motion and fact."

From Faulkner, Warren has learned to describe his native South with a two-planed realism. Out of his inherited experience Faulkner has created a unified body of writing in which every detail is simultaneously a natural part of the Southern scene and an inevitable movement in the dance of symbolism. Warren has never lost sight of this achievement, and at its best his style, like Faulkner's, assumes that role which Caroline Gordon has spoken of as Flaubert's ideal: the union of concrete historical detail with lyricism.

Warren's vision of the modern South is filled with horror, a horror of overwhelming social forces and blurred moral distinctions, of spiritual death. His style is a carefully shaped medium for expressing and circumscribing this horror. By showing its roots in the familiar word and common act, he reveals to us the full extent of the paralysis; he also makes it bearable, as the fear of death becomes bearable through constant repetition. All this is present in the final stanza and refrain of one of his poems:

> So when I wake I'll pat the head
> Of the beast that sleeps beside the bed,
> And put on my pants and vest, and go
> Down to eat my breakfast, though
>
> *Timor mortis conturbet me.*

The epigraph to *All the King's Men*, taken from the speech of the excommunicated Manfred in Canto III of the *Purgatorio*, defines the dominant tone of Warren's novels. His characters may be doomed but their doom is not universal, it springs from "the terrible division of their age." They are all excommunicates, men separated from the community of tradition and love, and their violence is an attempt to

comprehend this separation by dramatising it. For some (such as Willie Stark) the violence is physical and instinctive. For others (such as Jack Burden) it is a slow violence of mind, an impatient distortion of language in the search for meaning. Warren's moral bias is Calvinistic: like Milton, he believes that the existence of evil is the index of God's creative power, and the bringing of good out of evil the index of His mercy. The fable which opens *All the King's Men* is an oblique statement of this theme, an image in miniature of the novel's moral action. Out of the lives of those who turn from the way and are lost, still groping for the key, God will bring order and love. Willie Stark "came to" at the moment of his death, too late to save himself but in time to destroy Jack Burden's faith in the Great Twitch.

> You look up the highway and it is straight for miles, coming at you, with the black line down the center coming at and at you . . . and if you don't quit staring at that line and don't take a few deep breaths and slap yourself hard on the back of the neck you'll hypnotize yourself and you'll come to just at the moment when the right front wheel hooks over into the black dirt shoulder off the slab, and you'll try to jerk her back on but you can't because the slab is high like a curb, and maybe you'll try to reach to turn off the ignition just as she starts the dive. But you won't make it, of course. . . . Then a few days later the boys from the Highway Department will mark the spot with a little metal square on a metal rod stuck in the black dirt off the shoulder, the metal square painted white and on it in black a skull and crossbones. Later on love vine will climb up it, out of the weeds.

The men and women of these four novels are free, their violence is the measure of their freedom, and for those who have comprehended through violence the nature of their separation and division there is still the possibility of communion. The prerequisites are an affirmation of freedom, of the responsibilities of history, and a belief that man is not lost *mentre che la speranza ha fior del verde*—so long as hope retaineth aught of green.

BOOK REVIEW

Poems and Satires, by Robert Graves: Cassell 7/6

A FACT which all those who try to write poetry recognise, but seldom acknowledge without giving it up altogether, is that being a poet is a whole-time job, requiring a single-minded devotion to a single, although infinitely various theme. Those who have read Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* will be aware of what, in Graves' view, that theme is. They may agree or disagree; but whatever their attitude, they will not deny that the author's own devotion to that theme has been faithful, consistent, and exceptional. The force of conviction—and impulse behind—his prose, which is his livelihood, is poetic: a determination to discover factual truth. He has always remained independent of party, cult or creed. And he has never, in prose, made a statement of belief', but has confined himself to what are, in his view, strictly historical or anthropological facts. Even his anticipation of the return of a matriarchal system in the last chapter of *The White Goddess* is based throughout upon anthropological evidence, not on a subjective assessment of the spiritual benefits which might ensue. So his poems stand by themselvs, exerting their full force without need of context. Why they can do this is because Graves possesses a sharper awareness than any other writer of his time, of the difference between local, or factual truth, and spiritual truth. The latter phrase has been spoiled in the interests of the former—but that is no reason to deny its existence. When we can read Graves' long reconstruction of the life of Jesus, based on a mass of early Christian and Talmudic evidence (in *The Nazarene Gospel Restored*, written with the collaboration of Joshua Podro, and forthcoming from Cassell) we shall witness how surely imagination is guided by fact; when we read his *Collected Poems* (Cassell, 1948), and then this new volume, now, we witness how surely facts are guided by imagination—in a record of 'the intenser moments', as he calls his poems, of a spiritual autobiography.

Graves began with an aversion to prose: he had a conviction that because it was 'local' it was therefore against the interests of poetry—a purely time-serving activity. However, he soon found that his service to the timelessness of poetry would be least compromised by writing prose; and he was promptly acclaimed as a splendid prose writer; was even, for some years, almost forgotten as a poet. Only recently have critics and poetry-readers begun to take his poems seriously; this to realise that his prose represents that side of him which needs to establish what, poetically, he would call 'local truth'. After all, a poem, ideally may be defined as an absolutely true, that is, uncontemporary, statement, in absolutely contemporary terms. Thus, it may further be defined as a magical reconciliation between local and absolute fact—but in the interests of the latter.

This new volume fulfils all that one would expect it to. There are, perhaps, some too-occasional poems included: *For The Rain It*

Raineth Every Day, Homage to Texas, The Dilemma—but even these are well above any so-called technical standards of today. Six are among the best he has ever written: *The Young Cordwainer, Questions In A Wood, The Portrait, Darien, The Survivor*, and *Prometheus*. They achieve complete simplicity without losing texture or wilfully departing from the traditions of English poetry in which Graves writes—and in which all English poets ought to write, since no one has proved himself better yet. There is something very different from T. S. Eliot, in the positiveness, from Dylan Thomas, in the precision, from W. H. Auden, in the originality, in *The Survivor*:

> 'To die with a forlorn hope, but soon to be raised
> By hags, the spoilers of the field; to elude their claws
> And stand once more on a well-swept parade ground
> Scarred and bemedalled, sword upright in fist
> At head of a new undaunted company:
>
> Is this joy? to be doubtless alive again,
> And the others dead? Will your nostrils gladly savour
> The fragrance, always new, of a first hedge-rose?
> Will your ears be charmed by the thrush's melody
> Sung as though he had himself devised it?
>
> And is this joy: after the double suicide
> (Heart against heart) to be restored entire,
> To smooth your hair and wash away the life-blood,
> And presently seek a young and innocent bride,
> Whispering in the dark: 'for ever and ever'?'

The physical impact of this, and other of Graves' poems, has often led his readers to miss the complexity that lies beneath the always extra-logical surface. He has himself written that poetry is a resolution of "speech into its original images and rhythms", and a recombination of these "on several simultaneous layers of sense into a multiple meaning." His own poetry has been developing towards a perfection of this. Although at all times he has concentrated on technique, his early poems were often characterised by looseness of content, even a tendency towards sentimentality—he has suppressed all such poems in his *Collected Poems*. During the thirties he successfully eliminated this characteristic, but sometimes at the cost of an over-manufactured quality; as in the conclusion of *Fiend, Dragon, Mermaid*:

> 'She dived; and quit of dragon, Fiend and her
> I turned my gaze to the encounter of
> The later genius, who of my pride and fear
> And love,
> No monster made but me'.

During the forties, when he published *Work in Hand*, and *Poems* 1938-45, he entered into his present phase; but not until this volume

(and in some newer poems since published in *The New Yorker, New Statesmen*, and elsewhere) has his unoccasional poetry so consistently displayed an organic relation of content and form, the seldom-achieved aim of all poets.

Of course, to consider a poet in terms of his "development" is dangerous: so many who have died poetic deaths when comparatively young have chosen to cover up their deaths by faking a development. And early poems, clumsy and badly-handled as they may be, often have a genuinely poetic "nap" or flavour which is impossible to repeat in later poems. Many of Graves' early poems have, and some of them he has wisely retained in his *Collected Poems*. But where a development is always as poetic as is his own — except for a brief excursion into psychology and metaphysics in 1924, no traces of which remain—then such an approach may be valuable. The most important thing about this volume is, of course, its contents. But all Graves' work, and in particular this book, serves as a good illustration for younger poets of the fact that I alluded to at the beginning. Eventually, innocence and devotion to the theme of poetry, reap their reward—the right word in the right place—but no postures will satisfy the Muse.

"Sweetheart," said I "strike now for Darien's sake."

Martin Seymour-Smith

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